

Why the Intelligence Community (IC) System Drives you Crazy, and How to Come in from the Cold

[A paper prepared for the CIA (not at their request) and a variety of spies]

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“The CIA has the highest divorce rate of any government agency” a source of mine said. Since he was a career intelligence veteran in his 70’s, I figured he was probably correct. Thus began a search to answer some questions with larger boundaries, like why the extreme resistance to change, and why the dramatic intelligence failures that no one studies more than the IC itself?

Why study dysfunction in national intelligence agencies? Because polite society is deeply dependent on a good, functional, healthy and wise intelligence community, all the more so in an age of terrorism and spreading WMDs. If you are sick, we are in danger. Actually, we are in plenty of danger already, so we pray most sincerely for your quick and complete recovery.

The Intelligence Community is also besieged by critics, some of whom don’t have a clue what they are talking about, so a high degree of skepticism is appropriate to dramatic claims like I will make here. Even high ranking, career insiders with large staffs and mandates (like ex-NSA director, General William Odom) have a difficult time grasping the totality of the IC system and struggle to get a hearing for their sincere reform proposals (1). Such thoughtful reviews typically deal with policy, budgets and organizational structure, but few can deal with the taboos I will discuss today. The best, and last such daring effort I am aware of was “The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence” (2) by a former exec. to a DDCI* and a five year veteran of State. Thirty years later, after many large reviews (3, 4, 5, 6, 7) the parallels with cult dysfunction remain profound.

Part of my answer is disturbing. **Intelligence “Tradecraft” induces mental illness.** To some this is heresy, to others, much less than a shocking discovery. Still it bothers me. Combine that induction with the exceptional stresses that go with operations and even with some analytic work, and you have a formula for tattered relationships. The security clearance system frustrates getting effective help, since the circle of ‘OK’ counselors is tiny and their loyalty to the company is usually greater than their loyalty to you. Trust is a precious thing in all human affairs, none more so than in marriages and counseling. But trust is also a fragile asset in the corrosive environment of spies, lies and endless rules regarding whom you can talk to, how and when.

Since security clearances required for one’s career frustrate getting effective help, and since exceptional stresses undoubtedly exist that are inexorable parts of the difficult work that spies, analysts and CI* people do, almost everyone inside is affected. When everyone is affected few can see the damage clearly. Those who do often leave their agencies with the stain of ‘not being a team player’ or ‘disgruntled’ or ‘not that good anyway.’ Other psychological defenses are profound, really, impressively armor-plated. So strong measures and words are necessary. * The rest of this essay will address this problem bluntly, but aims at solutions for practitioners.

* The DCI is Director of Central Intelligence; a DDCI is a deputy director. The IC is the Intelligence Community and CI is CounterIntelligence, or the folks who look for spies among us and in their agencies. The DO is Directorate of Operations and the DI is the Directorate of Intelligence; these are the two largest units in the CIA. The DO has dominated the DI historically. Otherwise I will try to avoid the acronyms so common in spooky-luky land * (37).

Divorce Rates, Alcoholism, and Low Morale (due to a toxic, corrosive, unhealthy working environment)

Many of the conclusions I will relate today apply to intelligence organizations in general, but my main focus will be the CIA since it is the easiest of America's 15 intelligence agencies to examine. Much has been written elsewhere about differences in agency cultures related to their different functions, and I will recognize those aspects briefly in two sections to follow. But for now, the question is: Does the CIA really have the highest divorce rate of any U.S. government agency, as alleged, and if so, why? I called the CIA's public affairs office, to get the 'real story' on agency divorce rates and if very lucky some help getting access to voluminous data they must have on the whole range of mental dysfunctions there since they test their people so thoroughly even to get a job interview, much less to be let loose on the world in operations.

Mentally ill people are sometimes reluctant to discuss their problems with professionals, or with prying strangers, or even to admit to themselves that anything could possibly be wrong. The PR people told me everything was just peachy at the agency. Right. Then they said they don't discuss personnel issues with the public; check out their website. Right. Surprise; nothing was there about divorce rates, alcoholism, mental illness, or any other negative consequences of employment at the agency. But everyone else says that morale is awful, especially now.

So I read agency veteran F.W. Rustmann's article in the Baltimore Sun of Dec. 8, 1996 (8), where he writes that when former DCI Admiral Stansfield Turner was trying to clean house, he asked a Naval Academy friend Rusty Williams to check out the DO. "One of the things he found was a particularly high divorce rate among CIA officers. Predictably he attributed this more to loose morals rather than stress, long hours and the dangers of their work." Moralism among "outsider" DCIs has been routinely deflected by defensive DO's, but at a great price. I will be moralistic here, and more biographical than any academic should be. The reasons should be clear if you read on. One of them is the considerable suffering among the better spies today.

Regarding moralism, let me affirm that this is a special problem in this domain, both excessive judgmentalism and excessively permissive attitudes (I have friends in both camps). But the greatest danger is that it reinforces psychological defense mechanisms that prevent the relevant psychopathologies from being healed. Excessive moralism offends more than it heals. So in the interest of full disclosure I affirm that I have personally committed almost every sin I will write about today, including spying on people, penetrating hostile intelligence agencies, and unearthing (and exposing) hostile spies sent to sow disinformation among unwitting American publics. I will spare you all the stories here; the point is that I have considerable sympathy for the people who work in such environments every day. So, like a zealous young priest, I would like to save their souls, or at least, their marriages and mental equilibria. More on priests later.

Regarding alcoholism, the first clue was the physical danger of being between the boys and the bar when the 5:00 bell rings. When I study serious issues I never rely only on literature, because there are some things you just have to experience to understand. Believe me, more work occurs at the bar than not, and that does not always wait for 5:00. It is actually difficult not to become a chronic drinker if you study spies like I do. Then there was an allegation by female operators in a class-action lawsuit that the culture of alcoholism in the DO was so profound that professional progress virtually required turning into boozier bar girls themselves. This did not fit the feminist formula for career advancement, and being hard-core operators they were not about to roll over for a bunch of luses.

Loch Johnson, in a really exceptional essay on problems in the IC written with great sympathy for the professionals who work there, had this to say about that in 2001 (9, page 11).

“Alcoholism is widespread inside the secret agencies (and widely ignored), a result in part of the stressful conditions under which many officers live overseas. They are often under close surveillance by hostile intelligence services and, in addition, they have odd working hours that entail late-night rendezvous and much social drinking as they seek to develop rapport with potential foreign recruits. Colleagues in the CIA’s fraternity of case officers waved aside Aldrich Ames’s periodic bouts of drunkenness, just one aspect of his horrendous “corridor file.” After all, if the Agency’s legendary chief of counterintelligence, James Angleton, and other senior officials could enjoy three-Martini lunches, why not their subordinates? This protective old-boy system among case officers that buffered Ames for so many years is one of the CIA’s most serious problems.”

There are other professions with exceptionally high rates of divorce, alcoholism, and stress. These include police, attorneys, and psychiatric care-givers. There are other professions with higher death rates than the CIA, like farmers and coal miners. They don’t have to fear being tortured to death like Beirut CIA station chief William Buckley, but they do know they may be eaten alive by their machines in a lonely field after 16 hour workdays, or trapped underground to die slowly in darkness and despair. No one has a higher death rate than soldiers at war, and they certainly bear psychiatric consequences. Yet their marriages endure more often, and other signs of stress are less. I have concluded, rightly or wrongly, that the main reason these other tough professions can manage their considerable work-related stresses better than spies is their ability to maintain a healthier relationship with polite society in general, unhindered by the thought control police whom ‘intelligence professionals’ must endure. More on this soon.

Denial, Deception and the DO vs. the DI

Few people illustrate the varieties of denial better than committed, but “compensated” alcoholics (compensated means you are not so far gone you can’t keep a job or shave anymore). All the more so when they are brilliant, creative people. Such people generate brilliant, creative rationalizations, so brilliant in fact that they often fool themselves more than others. Combine brilliant boozers with extensive education in the very best, time-tested techniques for deception and denial, and you can cultivate some minds that can fool themselves into a real pit of misery.

That’s their problem. Resulting damage to American national security is our problem. Damage to their families is why they have such high divorce rates, one of several reasons, all ultimately related to a culture of deception and denial that is corrosive to healthy relationships.

Every study I’ve examined comments in some way on “interagency rivalries” as another serious impediment to optimum function for our intelligence “community.” Some refer to a “culture problem” in the operations side of the CIA, or in the CIA entire. None come right out and claim that alcoholic nut cases are clinging to power there by any means necessary. No one wants to be unkind, of course, and I don’t either. But there’s more. No one wants to trigger the severe defensiveness of highly stressed out people with significant mental illness at the agency.

The DO is very different from the DI, to my eyes anyway. DI types are very much like professors or journalists, with the big exception that they do not publish their work publicly. This makes it more vulnerable to egregious errors because of the insular, politicized intellectual environment. That’s a real, and a big problem, but still a less serious problem than the criminal

mindset of the DO. That mindset is quite helpful for actual spies and the people who manage spies (case officers in agency lingo). It is often observed that the skills of the con artist are essential for operations, and are usually incompatible with the skills of the cops in the FBI or of the professional paranoids in either agency who do counterintelligence (CI) work. However, we should also recognize that the DO has always dominated the DI, and other parts of the larger IC (like the FBI) partly because of the operators' ruthless skills and virtual immunity to prosecution.

But second, we should not blame them too much for being that way because we selected them, we trained them, we put them in the field under awful conditions, and we tasked them to commit crimes against other nations in the interest of our own "national security" (or, for mere prosperity which is a different goal). Most of all, Presidents authorize most covert operations and as many critics have noted, these problems are not likely to change so long as Presidents view the CIA as their personal academy for secret power. They always do.

Finally, large segments of the American public prefer things this way. They want goods like absolute security and cheap gasoline without being bothered by the messy details necessary to deliver them. It is not fair to insist that our government deliver certain goods "by any means necessary" and then complain when shocking methods are used. Still, a big part of the problem in the IC is that these methods are deliberately obscured by a veil of secrecy, which covers sloth and criminal behaviors just as well as "national security," or legitimately secret information.

I am a DO type; capable of every kind of evil if it is necessary. Ruthless, manipulative, self-centered, aggressive – that's me. Controlling that dark side has been a big part of growing up, and there is no guarantee that control will never fail. The DO teaches people to regard every relationship as something to be manipulated for an objective. That is disgusting; so is blowing someone's head off. But I when I head out on a mission either one is possible. What I have just described is also the profile of a military intelligence officer, a compensated psychopath, or a jihadist, and all are important to the problems at the CIA. Some find warm homes there; others wage war. Many agencies share these problems. For a review of these issues in Israel's Mossad I recommend "By Way of Deception" by Victor Ostrovsky and Claire Hoy, 1990 (10, but see footnotes on other Israeli authors). These problems are neither new nor distinctly American.

Sociopaths, Narcissists and Psychopathic Personalities

Sociopaths hate society and authority, narcissists love themselves, and psychopaths lack a conscience or in extreme cases, even the ability to empathize at all. One of my more interesting sources claimed that the CIA specifically looked for, and selected psychopathic personalities "because they make better spies." He claimed to be a Ph.D. psychologist and a veteran of the CIA, and he certainly was fond of their work, not a critic in the usual sense. But validating the authenticity, credibility and reliability of sources is a big headache in serious work on spies, since they are such good liars and, when authentic, are attached to agencies that deliberately obscure the connection. He probably had a real Ph.D. in clinical psychology; whether he ever actually worked for the U.S. government is less certain. That he studied spies and enjoyed the psychiatric patterns, nuances and rationalizations of espionage was without a doubt.

So let us examine the claim for "face validity." How might psychopathic personalities "make better spies?" Would such people in the operations side of intelligence agencies fit with their record as seen by veterans, and from abroad (i.e., unfiltered by our domestic, lapdog press, which is another issue)? Well one thing psychopaths do much better than most people is to pass lie detector tests. Another thing they can do quite well is to hurt people without remorse. And

the distinguishing characteristic of psychopaths (11) is a ruthless self-interest, unbuffered by empathy or “conscience.” Finally, since these qualities frighten polite society and can be apparent early in life, they have usually lived very secret, double lives for decades to avoid punishments from more sociable others who are scared by ruthless, excellent liars who lack remorse. So maintaining cover stories and lying persuasively is like breathing to psychopaths.

Well, those sound like useful skills for actual spies to me. The original source for this allegation claimed energetically that, despite this calculated selection of psychopaths for at least some operations, the “sane” people at CIA always maintained control of the others by methods he described in some detail. A number of other sources of mine with fully verifiable inside experience, in both the DO as well as the DI, have made similar claims that the “cowboys” are always controlled by their handlers, the nuts by their shrinks, or the operators by their security personnel at home. Some of the control mechanisms described would raise hairs on normal heads, but that’s another matter. Still, one wonders if control is really all that good when you consider the foreign perspective on the CIA, which is almost 100% awful.

Being peculiar myself (anyone who studies spies closely must have at least a few screws loose) I want to reaffirm one other serious point. There is no doubt in my mind that tradecraft **induces** some of those ruthless mental issues, and paranoia in particular. When you are closely observing people with reputations for dangerous behavior, meeting strange guys with fake names in dark bars with guns under their armpits and so forth, it is quite hard not to become at least a bit paranoid. Imagine the situation case officers face, who must do this in foreign countries with police-state governments where there is no doubt at all what may happen if they get caught.

Just three more points on this collection of mental problems. First, mental illnesses blend and merge; these categories are fluid, related, and to a large degree artificial. Psychopaths and sociopaths can be considered variants of “anti-social personalities” but that’s mere nomenclature. Second, sociopaths hate society with its many rules and constraints. Being unconstrained can be useful for spy missions, where “any means necessary” to get the job done is a common rule. The main mission is deception, betrayal and stealing things, after all, what would you expect? But the CIA is so concerned about maintaining positive control of its operatives (largely due to a long list of very embarrassing and damaging covert operation failures) that I think the agency tries hard to screen out the sociopaths. Finally, narcissistic disorders are an especially fluid and complex spectrum of mental dysfunctions. No one has characterized the truly evil “malignant narcissist” better than M. Scott Peck (12). His book should be required reading for psychiatrists at the CIA, along with “The Mask of Sanity,” the classic work on psychopaths by Cleckley (11).

Paranoia and Schizophrenia, in individuals and institutions

I am going to switch now to a less obvious issue. The core point is that there are parallels between individual psychopathology and organizational structures. Compartmentalization of information in organizations leads to consequences remarkably like schizophrenia in individuals. Different units operate on different information and almost no one has “the big picture.” So all kinds of confusion is the norm. Furthermore, it is horrendously inefficient as each unit must scramble to understand important things independently. It has been noted that counterintelligence (CI) people are professional paranoids, because their work demands this. What can one expect when their primary job is finding spies and other kinds of traitors? They too must spy and lie in daily work, and are suspicious of everyone. They study treason in detail and know they are looking not for common criminals, but for brilliant, highly resourced agents backed by governments with extensive training in how to avoid detection.

The larger system DEMANDS paranoiac behavior. It REQUIRES reporting on neighbors, friends or others who might ask too many questions, even family in extremes. It INSISTS that officers shred documents normal people would not blink at, guard data more scrupulously than a bank, and maintain complex ‘cover stories’ for any number of audiences. This is all before putting someone in a dangerous, foreign context to commit crimes or even, more innocently, just to gather information for general intelligence (like reading papers at the embassy and attending those famous boozathons where disaffected, loose-lipped diplomats might be found).

Schizophrenia is more complicated than paranoia, but the core point is that “confused thinking” and “delusions” are mirrored by different agencies, which are generally NOT allowed to know what the others are doing. For really spooky groups, this extends to a culture where you are not allowed to know what the other guy (or girl or android) in the next cubicle is doing, much less in the next agency, and the cafeteria is adorned with reminders that you are not to speak about work while you’re at work, much less in normal life (well not in the cafeteria anyway, 13). The original reason for such tight “information security” is so that when a “mole” penetrates your agency, they can’t learn much because almost no one inside knows what is going on outside of their tiny box. Foreign agents can then learn only tiny bits when they “turn” or exploit a traitor within. The downside is phenomenal. Confusion competes with intellectual rot and group-think.

Psychiatrists use a concept called “dissociative identity disorder” or more colloquially “multiple personalities” to discuss problems that arise when one person acts as though they have two distinct minds. Spies under deep cover often experience similar problems keeping their real personalities intact while living (sometimes multiple) lies. The agencies mirror this when excess compartmentalization has them working from very different sets of data about the world.

Consider this excerpt from an Oct. 16, 2003 article in Wired by Noah Schachtman: “Our secrecy system is all about protecting security officers, and has nothing to do with protecting secrets. It’s a self-licking ice cream cone,” said Rich Haver, until recently Donald Rumsfeld’s special assistant for intelligence, now with Northrup Grumman. “We’re compartmentalizing the shit out of things. It’s causing a total meltdown of our intelligence processes.” (14) When you compartmentalize information excessively, you prohibit both integration AND correction of errors. You also impose enormous costs on the system and on the minds so afflicted.

Compartmentalization, Bureaucracy and Worst Case Methods

The term for chopping integrated information into tiny bits is “compartmentalization” and the problem with this practice, in both individuals and in institutions, is that it makes getting “the big picture” really difficult. At worst, it can drive you really nuts, because one box can have totally different information than the next box. The right hand can frustrate the left, or much worse in covert operations with sometimes lethal consequences. When only a few severely overworked senior administrators are “cleared” enough to look across the boxes, they don’t have time. So then, no one really knows what is going on, or what the truth really is. This difficulty is great within agencies; it is phenomenal across agencies that must deal simultaneously with grubby, mundane turf wars over budgets, egos, who’s in charge, what’s the policy (today?), etc. Loch Johnson (9, pg. 7) described that in this way: “The challenges of intelligence leadership are not isolated to the internal workings of the CIA. Only a Yugoslavian definition of ‘community’ could apply to the baker’s dozen that comprise America’s intelligence establishment.”

Combine Balkanization of information with a herd of professional paranoids (the CI and security gangs) polygraphing everyone, others testing body fluids (the drug and biometric police)

others vetting political views (the informal commissars whose parameters change with administrations), the PC gang (infiltrating everywhere) with some very legitimate reasons to be afraid of other countries that have armies and real grievances (and to chop up critical national security information like detailed nuclear weapons designs) and you have a truly exquisite formula for mental distress. Then comes “worst case analysis” which is a prudent form of planning endorsed by militaries through the ages.

Professional militaries certainly have good reasons to prepare for the worst. They don’t like “Pearl Harbors” which kill thousands of their own people, or “9/11’s,” and they don’t want even one single nuclear weapon going off in any American city on their watch because someone did not take rare but real possibilities into proper account. So they plan for the worst. They are guardians of everything we value, and the best take this responsibility quite seriously. So they, and the IC which supports them, want everyone to err on the side of caution regarding both assessment of enemy capabilities and intentions, and in terms of “information security,” which is the root cause of that compartmentalization. Thus comes the sacred “security clearance system” which reads like the loyalty codes of any highly controlling, paranoid, and exploitative cult.

Aristotle observed that any virtue carried to its furthest extreme can become a dangerous vice. This is exactly what has happened in the American IC system. Good goals, and good techniques of ‘tradecraft’ have been pushed for good reasons to extremes that are endangering America and the world. More to the point of this essay, they tend to drive practitioners to mental illness, but since the whole thing is veiled by excessive secrecy the illnesses cannot be observed by outsiders or even, sometimes, by insiders who are the most thoroughly propagandized of all. Thus come the horrific ‘failures of intelligence’ that so many worry about, but none can solve.

A concrete example might help. It is now recognized that intelligence regarding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq which led to the second Gulf War was at best highly flawed. The NY Times provides these details (15). Reports from “credible” sources indicating aggressive WMD programs in Iraq actually came from very dubious sources from an expatriate group that was explicitly trying to provoke war by the United States against the Hussein regime. But to protect those sources, their identities were withheld even from most of the intelligence community. The same source was sometimes described in different ways, so it looked to analysts like one report was being confirmed by another, even though they were echoes of one voice. An insider term for this is “incestuous amplification.” The DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) had discredited one of the main sources back in 2002, but because of compartmentalization, the CIA did not know that the man was a confirmed “fabricator.” The politicized search for data to confirm a preconceived policy also led to creation of an “Office of Special Plans” in the Pentagon under Douglas Feith, to end run the skeptical DIA and CIA. That office cherry-picked such items and fed them to VP Dick Cheney’s office who forwarded them to the President. Shocking details on this are now provided by Col. K. Kwiatkowski who worked there (16). Then President Bush, VP Cheney, and even Secretary of State Colin Powell gave eloquent, unhedged, and completely inaccurate accounts of the situation to many key audiences prior to the invasion of a sovereign nation, including the U.S. Congress, the United Nations and the American public. ~ 10 million people protested worldwide on the eve of war, but the inner circle ignored them too. Global opinion of America dropped like lead in the ocean, which has many serious consequences of its own. A particularly grave consequence of this tragic failure of intelligence and of policy was the slaughter of very roughly 40,000 Iraqis, at least 10,000 of whom were civilians, and the deaths of 590 American servicemen on the day of writing, with over 3,500 wounded. No one knows when the casualty count will stop climbing, because no one knows when this war will really end.

The Security Clearance and Classification Systems

The “security clearance” is a ticket for employment, allowing one to work with “classified information.” Both have legitimate rationales that have been carried to ridiculous extremes. The Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy led by Senator Moynihan did a thorough job of documenting how excesses here actually make protecting the serious secrets more difficult, lead to vast recurring, annual expenses, undercut democracy, protect malfeasance, incompetence and frankly criminal behaviors, and have other serious negative consequences (17). So I will focus on the security clearance piece of the puzzle here.

The core reason for a security clearance is straightforward. Any spy agency or military unit needs to keep spies from other countries out of their candy store and munitions factories. How can you do this if you do not test for loyalty in some way? The ways they choose today take months and anywhere from \$25,000 per person, to upwards of \$250,000 depending on just how “clear” the individual must be. That is obviously quite expensive, and can take 9 months or more for the more select groups like the CIA, NSA or NRO. There is no uniform system since each agency tends to think it has special reasons for special procedures to clear their personnel.

Far less obvious are a set of downsides I will simply list. First, the very same procedures that weed out foreign spies also weed out some of the world’s most talented individuals. They won’t put up with that BS. Second, the very same procedures that weed out morally dubious individuals, weed out some of the most moral. They won’t lie when the system requires this, and they won’t rat on their friends about petty things no matter how much the spooky CI or retired FBI guy who is checking them out wants to know. Third, the system weeds out critics, people who question assumptions, think ‘outside the box’ or are too creative, since all of these qualities worry the bureaucrats in charge of security clearances. That’s not good when you want to avoid stifling group-think, or to engage creative problem solvers. Finally, and this may be the most pernicious effect of all, forever after the “clearance” puts a shackle on the mind so cleared, which must forever after censor what it says to others, who it listens to, and what it does in a diffuse, undefined array of areas, since no one really knows for sure WHAT their security officer will decide is a good reason to review one’s “security clearance.” Without that clearance, your career is over. The closest parallel to a professor’s life would be if one’s Ph.D., earned over many years of very hard labor, could be pulled at the whim of any number of faceless senior administrators or commissars of classified thinking. Your whole career is at risk, so your whole life is diminished in service to the clearance without which employment (in the secret system) is impossible. It turns into a thought control system that many cults would envy.

Long ago I studied the “Scientologists” of L. Ron Hubbard who also seek to be “clear.” Scientology is a large, successful cult that aspires to be a religion and has fought the government fiercely over who gets to define those terms. In order to understand Scientology one must learn their inside vocabulary, for which one can buy whole books (many). Spies also have inside jargons, so I own dictionaries of spookspeak too. The parallels boggle the mind. Scientologists get “clear” by spending thousands of dollars taking specialized classes on doctrine and being “audited” while holding a simple galvanometer that is renamed an “E-meter” for which the organization charges many hundreds of dollars. Polygraph testing for CIA candidates involves galvanometers too. And soothsayers who are called ‘polygraph examiners’ instead of ‘auditors’ ponder the squiggles seeking clues of inner truth, or at least of veracity. This farce employs thousands of people every one of whom thinks they are doing terribly serious business for the good of all. If any one of them dared to call it a farce, they would lose their career in a heartbeat. Spies can lie, and even fully cleared Scientologists can make mistakes; that’s OK. But to speak

the truth, to say that the system is a farce, this is grounds for instant dismissal. The emperor can tolerate many sins, a great many very grave sins if you look deeply into the system, but pointing out that he has no real clothes on, that is crossing a serious line – back to sanity – that cannot be ignored. David Lykken wrote the definitive work on use and abuse of polygraphs in 1980 (18).

“Need to Know” and “Ends vs. Means”

Two other principles of the stressful environment that spies and analysts work in further complicate challenges to intellectual acuity and moral balance. These are “need to know” and “by any means necessary,” which is one answer to the ancient question of ends versus means.

The theory behind “need to know” is compartmenting information to discourage other spies. You only get to know secrets if you “need” to know them for your job. That must work OK for tiny jobs, but I guarantee it also stunts the minds so shackled. In my own work, it would be crippling in two distinct ways. First, it damages the ability to associate information from different places, times and conceptual domains. That ability is essential for pattern recognition and discerning the meaning of big pictures and complex phenomena. In agency lingo, “need to know” reduces the ability to “connect the dots.” Second, I need to know ... everything. One of my jobs is information networking among scores of different domains and hundreds of people. I don’t know on any day which requests will come my way. So to do a good job, and to give good advice, I need to know as much as possible about everything including some sacred secrets. Most of those secrets are meaningless, archaic or trivial, but a small percentage are really important. Compartmentalization and its evil twin the “need to know” principle are anathema to those goals.

“By any means necessary” is a euphemism for ruthless, cruel, illegal and often immoral methods. Anyone can think of scenarios, for example, where torture might be necessary to get time urgent information quickly in order to save a city of innocents from evil nuclear terrorists. And every soldier knows of situations where the laws of war may be bent to save their comrades’ lives. It is less obvious that when people adopt the “ends justify the means” philosophy they can easily become agents for the dark side. When everyone uses the rule “by any means necessary,” you live in a society where torture, theft and killing are common. Then there is no longer any meaningful difference between the “terrorist” and the agents of the police-state. Believe me, police-states are no fun to live in, and their agents use terror to control their populations. They become actual terrorists. Thus there is no dignity left for their warriors, nor joy for their peoples.

Disinformation, Propaganda, PsyOps and Delusional Thinking

One of the main tools of spies is propaganda, and it has been so since the beginning of governments. But ancient methods of controlling domestic audiences by control of information, or of influencing the behavior of other governments and of people by calculated lying, have been much enhanced since World War II. Hitler’s infamous Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels was an amateur compared to the modern masters of mind control. They often come from Madison Avenue, and they always study the techniques of modern advertising. I have known the Army’s best and brightest, quite well, and can guarantee you they are most sincere. Not always accurate, not by a long shot! But they are sincere as the driven snow, and patriotic too.

Old-fashioned propaganda came in white, gray and black versions with whole books on technique, and schools to use them. It was powerful enough. But primitive propaganda has become a modern science called “psychological operations” which can be applied against entire

populations, or specific “targeted” individuals, with devastating effect depending on the balance of forces involved and especially on the degree of control over information sources. Among the many tools of modern PsyOps (as practitioners like to call it) is disinformation.

Since every spy agency in the world knows about and sometimes uses “disinformation” analysts are trained to beware of it. Since every spy agency in the world, but especially the CIA, maintains extensive contacts with journalists in almost every medium, analysts develop a generally healthy skepticism about press reports that could have been planted by their enemies. But like everything else in spooky-luky land, this healthy skepticism can morph into extremes that isolate the analyst or operator, and slowly drive them nuts.

Some earlier comments on how this works among the Scientologists are appropriate here, and some to come about the Moonies too. But you don’t have to be a cult enthusiast or member of a fundamental sect to be vulnerable to the dangers of single sourcing and unquestionable truths. You can also be a normal human being who just accepts advice to regard only your agency’s publications as authoritative, and all other sources suspect due to the prevalence of “disinformation” and it’s cousins “misinformation,” propaganda and simple human errors of every kind. Once you read only the approved publications, or talk only to “cleared” people, you are at great risk of delusional thinking. Sociologists labeled this form “group-think” long ago.

One final note on this. Many genuinely mentally ill people are prone to “conspiracy theories” and to other aspects of truly paranoid thought. But spyworld and its allies in the media also recognized early on that this truth, like many others, could be exploited to their advantage. Thus many perfectly accurate perceptions of covert manipulation of information and events are quickly dismissed by both media and agencies as fevered thinking by “conspiracy theorists” or “buffs.” But what is a spy agency if not an organized conspiracy to gather information about the world and to influence it “covertly” by secret propaganda and “covert actions?” In America there is a whole body of law about such things, and \$35 billion annual budgets! Other countries do this too. To think that conspiracies never happen is as silly as to think they always do. The most successful propaganda campaign in history was the one that convinced so many otherwise intelligent people that organized conspiracies seldom exist, and that evil is not real.

It has been said that truth is the first casualty of war, and that the truth will set you free. Inability to discern truth is also a first step to serious mental illness. Propaganda is a systematic effort to distort truth, promoted by governments with great resources at their disposal. Be aware.

MKULTRA, Paperclip, Coups, Assassinations and other Skeletons in the Closet that live on to Haunt You

No matter how pure and good the new recruit, they will encounter some consequences of history. MKULTRA was a vast research program on mind control methods conducted mainly in the 1950’s and 60’s due to fears about North Korean “brainwashing” techniques. It involved “at least 150 research projects” (19, pages 8, 185, and 838-9, original source CIA) conducted at scores of major American Universities (including one I teach at, the University of Minnesota) at least one Canadian University and several offshore locations. Their results were so disturbing that then-DCI Richard Helms claimed he had the files burned shortly before Senator Frank Church began the most probing review of American Intelligence ever (7). For a measure of how disturbing, at least one project involved systematic torture of small children to see if useful mental illnesses could be induced so that later in life they could become exceptional assassins, or couriers whose secret information was buried in personality alters that could not be revealed even under more torture.

A single example from a different genre, clandestine drug testing, at my University will suffice here. A psychometrist code-named Mary Ray testified to another Senate Committee on Nov. 7, 1975 that a 17 yr. old minor, mildly disturbed psychiatric out-patient was chosen as subject for unwitting LSD experimentation. She was hospitalized, then subjected to at least 10 sessions of massive doses of LSD (2,000 micrograms, about ten times a street dose) until she was rendered catatonic for 4 days (20). The psychometrist recalled a Nazi-like doctor ordering aides to drag the screaming patient into the experimental areas towards the end of this macabre perversion of scientific method. I have no doubt that all involved except the unwitting patient who had come for help sincerely believed that America “needed to know” for some urgent, national security reason.

Whether this doctor was a genuine Nazi doctor or just a zealous researcher is unknown to me, or her. That America had imported hundreds of genuine Nazi doctors, engineers and scientists prior to this period is without a doubt. That story is also admitted by the CIA, and recorded in books about “Project Paperclip” (21) and by the Commission on Human Radiation Experiments among other sources. This notorious operation was part of early Cold War competition between the Soviet Union and America over who would get the most value from Hitler’s surviving scientists. Our most famous immigrant under this program was Dr. Wernher Von Braun, father of our ICBM program. The Nazi medical doctors avoided publicity for fairly obvious reasons.

Resulting crimes of MKULTRA were so egregious that they offended even extremely hardened operators who had gone through the trials and compromises of World War II, like Richard Helms and the subsequent DCI William Colby, so some reforms were actually instituted after the Pike Committee and Church Committee investigations of CIA abuses in the mid-1970’s. These reforms included creating a “Congressional oversight system” which (while virtually toothless) is still better than nothing. A congressman very close to that told me personally that the real job was to “overlook, not to oversee.” But the point of this brief section is to observe that regardless of who is to blame or what “corrective measures” are taken, such crimes resonate for generations to haunt even the most sincere and innocent intelligence analyst 30 and 50 years later.

Why the damage resonates over time may be easier to understand with coups, murders and political assassinations. Two of the earliest big “success stories” of the CIA were coups in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954) accomplished on low budgets by covert paramilitary, political, economic and psychological operations. To this day millions of Iranians and Guatemalans, therefore, hate America to the bone because they do not forget murders of their loved ones or destruction of their national economies so easily as the operators in Washington do, or that dormant American public which is deliberately deceived (and targeted) by the secrecy system.

Iranians have neighbors too, and many Latin countries far beyond Guatemala have felt the force of US covert operations including lovely details like training police of military governments in techniques of “interrogation” that anyone else would call torture, sponsoring death squads, etc. (22). So CIA agents in Muslim and Latin countries fear for their lives today because of things that happened decades ago. This is true regardless of what they are doing now, and of course, they do not say. So, suspicious minds will always infer that the embassy spies are continuing their evil old ways. A long history of subverting democracy and abusing human rights in poorer, weaker countries resonates to the detriment even of ordinary tourists generations later. To the point of this essay, that real history puts a serious strain on the most innocent mind that enters the CIA today. Brilliant people enter the agency every day, but as a group they appear* almost as ignorant of the real history of US foreign policy as the college students I work with every day. *(small sample)

On murders and assassinations, retreat into legalistic hairsplitting is the agency norm, which convinces no one but themselves. Many times I have heard official CIA representatives admit that, well yes, they did try to kill a VERY FEW foreign leaders LONG ago, like Fidel Castro of Cuba and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, but that these efforts failed and that the practice was forbidden in 1976 by President Ford. Ronald Reagan reinforced this ban with Executive Order #12333 in 1983. Such denials are somewhat pathetic since there is zero doubt that the agency sponsored whole armies years later (like the Contra's of Nicaragua during the mid-1980's) that killed tens of thousands of people. The agency also published whole books on "Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare" (23) that described who to select for assassination (for maximum propaganda effect). These were distributed to tens of thousands of covert soldiers. The CIA maintains today a Special Operations Group (SOG) of paramilitary commandos, ... for what? To suck their thumbs and draw pensions? Not likely during this 'war on terrorism' that claims victims all around the world. They recently bragged about nailing one of their targets with a Hellfire missile fired from an unmanned Predator aircraft over Yemen (a technical coup) and presumed the 5 other people in his car were bad boys too. Do the PR people think we are all morons?

These special operations, most of which are quite small and many of which employ the US Army Special Forces, or the Delta force, or Navy Seal Team 6, rather than dedicated CIA "SOG's" continue in over 100 countries in a typical year. These "Ops" are kept secret from the American public, but they are never secret to the victims' families. Sometimes the victims are really bad men who are unloved. Sometimes not. Often they are mixed, both good, bad and utterly innocent. We blew up 80 people in Beirut one day years ago, trying to get one bad mullah who escaped. Either way their relatives record the crimes, their neighbors attend to what happened just like you would, and some of them share the resulting hatred with Americans who come back to tell us what really happened. In the worst cases they kill Americans in retribution, many of whom had absolutely nothing to do with the original sins. Thus do secret crimes resonate through time.

Many books have been written about this secret history of American foreign policy, some by fierce critics of the CIA (like William Blum, whose "CIA: A Forgotten History" is a classic, 24) others by career veterans of the CIA (like John Stockwell, a former agency station chief in Angola who revealed much about covert support for a civil war there – and about the Lumumba murder – in, "In Search of Enemies," 25). But my point here is not repeating that tragic and sometimes sordid history. My point is emphasizing its effect on the morale and the mental health of intelligence professionals today, both analysts and operators, in whatever agency they work for.

When they sign that non-disclosure agreement to keep secrets sacred, they do not just agree to keep legitimate secrets like nuclear weapons designs or military deployments. They agree to keep secret EVERY crime they may ever witness or hear about under penalty of law. Sure, they may report malfeasance to the black hole of internal affairs offices that almost never do anything about them (at considerable risk to the whistleblower's career and occasionally life, of course). But telling such secrets to the American public is a crime the secret system takes much more seriously than, for example, killing foreign nationals in covert actions. Revealing secrets to the public is considered almost as serious as outright treason, and is treated very harshly.

This environment puts a serious strain on any intelligent, healthy, educated and once empathetic mind with a conscience. Most people enter this field with sincerely good intentions. But a great strain gets put on their minds the day they really join the brother and sisterhood of clandestine service, which presents some very severe consequences over the long term.

Parallels with the Priesthood

Spies and analysts are not the first group of people to grapple with grave moral dilemmas, with high stress occupations, or with crime among the ranks of a secretive brotherhood. So in my quest for solutions to close this essay, I will look for a moment at another group of ‘special’ people that is dealing with serious criticism and morale problems during these difficult times. Those are clergy, and specifically Roman Catholic Priests in America today. Every day I see more than most people do, since I also teach at a Catholic University about 100 meters from a seminary where priests-to-be are trained.

As everyone now knows, they have had an exceptional problem with pedophiles and pedophilia among the ranks during the last century. As important, their system which was undoubtedly founded on moral principles conspired to cover up thousands of cases of this crime by thousands of priests over many, many years (26). Thus the blame was spread from the relatively few egregious sinners to all those tens of thousands of other priests who knew, but observed their vows of obedience to the hierarchy and were silent as pedophile priests were bounced from one parish to another, or from job to job within the same church jurisdiction. It is a system of secrecy and submission very much like the bureaucratic world that spies live in (27).

There are quite a few other significant parallels between these two groups, priests and spies, so I will simply list them now.

- Both are exceptionally dedicated to the welfare of their institutions, and to their missions, which are theoretically and sometimes in fact dedicated to the good of all.
- Both must work very hard to become certified members of their groups.
- Both learn extensive internal languages, rules, and rituals.
- Both must utter strict vows of secrecy and obedience to a leadership hierarchy with long traditions as a condition for employment by the brotherhood.
- Both recognize that no humans are perfect, including themselves, but try to do good anyway, albeit in different ways. Their images of human evil may be very different, however.
- Both historically were almost exclusively male, although the spy world has always had more room for women than the Roman Catholic priesthood. Neither has coped very well with the feminist revolution. The priests do have sister nuns, in ever shrinking numbers, and the church engages many other devoted religious women, just in different ways.
- Both must forswear virtually all vices except for alcohol, smoking and overeating, and both are subject to abrupt dismissal if caught violating that rule (e.g. for using illegal drugs). Priests, of course, are supposed to be 100% celibate; spies very seldom are. A difference! But less than one might expect, because some spies are celibate too, and few priests 100%.
- Both work very long, very hard hours with many sometimes stressed-out clients, parishioners, or colleagues, and both often get involved with difficult problems of those other people.
- When faced with moral crises that could bring scandal to their institutions, both are duty bound to bring these observations to, and only to, other representatives of the institution.
- Both are supposed to handle confidential information with extreme discretion, risking even life and limb should other authorities try to squeeze it from them. Secrecy is sacred.
- And finally, both must subscribe to some “party line” beliefs that are obviously untrue.

Among priests an example could be the doctrine of papal infallibility on various questions; among American spies it could be the allegedly noble intentions of American foreign policy. No matter how silly such things may seem to outsiders, they must be maintained at all times or you can be drummed out of the sacred club. Subscribing to and publicly maintaining silly things that are obviously untrue has some other, rather serious consequences to the mind so bound.

Spies are more variable in this respect than priests, and obviously work for different countries with different party lines. But most subscribe to some version of national security worship which serves the same basic function of sealing nearly unquestionable obedience to the command hierarchy that sustains them and sometimes serves a larger good for their society.

Since almost no-one can really live up to all those restrictions all of the time, both groups are also exceptionally forgiving of members who lapse. Both also involve large numbers of people who devote nearly every waking hour and fiber they can in service to their communities and to their institutions. Really, if you get to know spies and priests very well as I have, you know for sure that many are exceptionally idealistic people who really do exemplify service to larger goods and goals. But still, still, most of them will also protect brothers in their midst who injure the innocent, even repeatedly. These are brotherhoods of the tightly bonded kind, very exclusive brotherhoods with stressful jobs and high moral goals. But the vows of secrecy and nearly blind obedience get them into very serious trouble. How can we restore the honor which should come to people who sacrifice so much in the service of larger goods?

Previous efforts at Reform, Citizens as Enemies, and Good People in Evil Systems

When former Director of the NSA, Gen. William Odom did his best to fix this (1, p2) he wrote: “After almost three decades of such episodes [major intelligence failures], no fundamental reform has occurred. Virtually all congressional investigations and reform studies have merely focused on the scandals and raised policy issues.” When Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, decorated by the CIA for exemplary service to the secret world in his youth, devoted his last days to exposing the corrosive effects of excessive government secrecy in 1997 (17) he despaired that needed change could occur because bureaucratic interests had historically obstructed all reforms. In the end, he called “for abolition of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and a fundamental restructuring of the entire intelligence community.” (9, page 1). When huge counterintelligence scandals were revealed by the treasons of Aldrich Ames (CIA/CI), Robert Hanssen (FBI/CI), and Jonathan Pollard (Office of Naval Intelligence, or ONI) people murmured that there must be something wrong, but very little actually happened to correct that. IC-21 came and went without effect (3), the Aspen-Brown Commission (4), pithy papers were published by the CFR (5) and other brainy intel-NGOs (6), all to be ignored. In every case obsession with secrecy about topics sacred to the bureaucracy trumped cleaning up the mess to protect America.

Many critics both inside and outside the IC have noted that “classification” can cover incompetence, waste, sloth, theft and criminal behavior up to and including treason as easily as it can cover legitimate national security secrets. And it does. For a really scathing review of these issues, you might read 25 year intelligence veteran Robert D. Steele’s “On Intelligence” (28, version 1.4 of October 11, 2003). He writes there that: “9-11 was *both* an intelligence failure *and* a policy failure. It continues to trouble me that in the two years prior to 9-11, capping decades of Presidential and Congressional commissions on intelligence reform, no fewer than 15 books on intelligence deficiencies and intelligence reform were published. All were ignored.”

Despite a string of failures that would embarrass the most self-centered professor, the zealots of security hold forth for classifying everything on the theory that this is the safest path. “Better ‘safe’ than sorry!” the professional paranoids and worst case analysts proclaim. Steele calls them the security gremlins, and wants them put back in the closet. What they cannot see clearly is that this practice induces paranoia, not just professional, but clinical. Bureaucrats

concur with the urge to classify for other reasons, because openness invites questions from the prying public and those intolerably curious media types. ‘Look how much FOIA has cost us, neutered though it is?,’ they say. (FOIA is the Freedom of Information Act, a great idea that has been gutted by the gremlins and the latest wave of official hysteria). Openness threatens budgets – can’t have that! And who has time for pesky oversight committees anyway? There is not time or money on this earth to answer all the questions from a prying public (they will say), which certainly does include some hostile spies. Even administrations in polite society (like churches!) are loath to open their files to outsiders, and they all have reasons, some quite legitimate. Others hide their pedophiles this way. Some secrets really are important (like sources, some methods, ongoing operations, nuclear weapons designs and SIOPs [plans for nuclear war], or recipes for other WMDs). Why not be ‘safe’ and just classify everything? Good answers are because: a) it drives you nuts, b) it reduces the accuracy of your conclusions, c) it’s outrageously expensive, and, d) it fundamentally undercuts democracy.

In the short run, it is much easier for the cleared nuts to dismiss critics as simple-minded fools or dupes of the great conspiracy among our enemies to undercut domestic support through artful disinformation campaigns. In the long run, by this process you are **doomed**. Since disinformation is certainly a tool of tradecraft, and since real evidence exists of actual enemies using those tools we know so well (from ordinary propaganda to sophisticated PsyOps) it is really easy in the short run to just pretend that critical Americans are simply misguided and that some are traitors, manipulating the rest. Citizens become enemies in the eyes of the state. When the CIA last adopted this attitude, it “generated a data bank on 1.5 million U.S. citizens, many of whom had their mail intercepted and read in clear violation of the law. No one was safe: not Richard Nixon, not Leonard Bernstein, not John Steinbeck, not Arthur Burns – all of whom had their mail opened. The FBI launched 500,000 investigations of so-called subversives (mainly Vietnam War and civil rights activists, with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a primary target), without a single court conviction; the NSA monitored every cable sent overseas, or received, by Americans; and Army intelligence units conducted investigations against 100,000 American citizens during the Vietnam War era, including members of the Urban Coalition, the Anti-Defamation League, and that hotbed of insurrection – the Chamber of Commerce.” (9, page 13). Now, the IC wants “Total Information Awareness” renamed by the Pentagon as “Terrorist Information Awareness” to preserve funding for the new, data-mining and fusion technologies that make an illegal paper file on citizens unnecessary, since electronic files can now be created on anyone in seconds by supercomputers drawing on thousands of public and private databases.

When I studied the Moon organization (a.k.a. the Unification Church of the “Reverend” Sun Myung Moon) they accomplished this same goal by liaison with intelligence agencies world-wide, sharing data on potential enemies (always of the political left by some miraculous coincidence) and by defining critics as “agents of Satan,” sent to damage the “heaven-sent” Moon group. “Disinformation” and “Satanic Inspiration” work exactly the same in the minds of those who are desperate to deny information that could challenge their profoundly dysfunctional worldviews. It keeps the truth at bay so that cult leaders can more easily control their disciples. In the long run the disciples become mentally ill, their families suffer, and their organizations decay due to systemic inability to respond to corrective feedback from the real world.

I stress here that I do **not** say that EVERYONE in the spy world is sick or dysfunctional. I do say that the system induces illness in various ways. The Catholic Church discovered only 4% of priests were pedophiles (in America). But that 4% caused deep harm to all the rest, because the system they work in implicates all who preserve the secrecy essential for such crimes to continue.

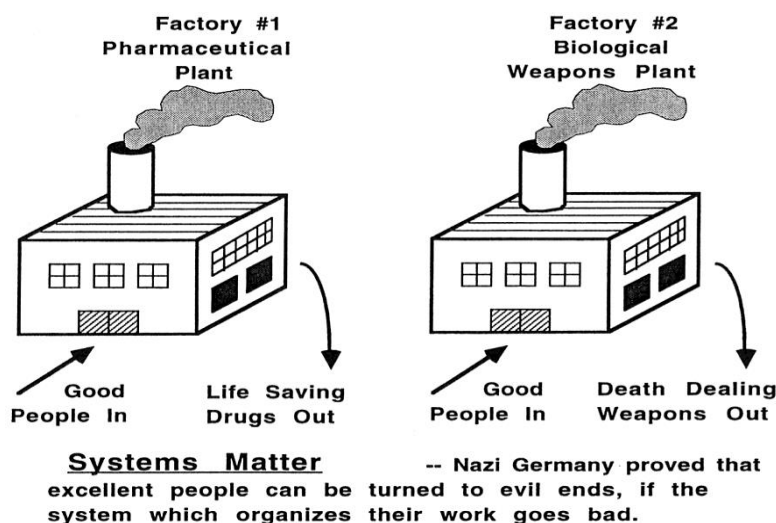


Figure 22: An Example of Organizational Evil

Figure 22 illustrates another significant part of this problem (29, pg. 118). Systems matter. “‘The turning of a few valves can mean the difference between a pharmaceutical company and a chemical or biological plant.’ said the Agency’s leading proliferation specialist.” (in 9, page 3) You can put 100% exemplary people into an evil system, and if information controls are artful those good people will chug away doing excellent, hard-working, first-class work ... for evil. In their heads, they will be super-patriots, and the best will sacrifice even life itself. Many will sacrifice families, since the work is ‘so urgent’ and the management so indifferent to real welfare among workers’ families, or to squishy concepts like love, God, or genuine patriotism. Nazi Germany provided many examples of the good German worker serving evil ends, but Stanley Milgram (30) and the Mormon Church among many others have shown that “good Germans” are everywhere. Good Germans, in fact, are just good workers – exceptionally good workers who strive to please by doing exactly what they are told without excess questions or introspection.

Lest I offend everyone unnecessarily, a few words on the good German phenomenon might help here. We are ALL vulnerable to this, because we are ALL social creatures with some desire to conform. This was indispensable to early tribal groups that depended on each other for survival. Being social creatures, we calibrate our moral compasses by reference to the social group around us and its moral leaders. When your moral leaders and creators of institutional structure include deeply disturbed individuals like James “Jesus” Angleton (the previously noted and spectacularly paranoid former chief of Counterintelligence at CIA), you are at serious risk. Isolation from other worldviews by exaggerated fears for “information security,” and concepts like “disinformation” or “Satanic influence” encapsulate the dysfunction, and prevent correction.

This is the basic mechanism by which genuinely good, hard-working, sincere people who often call themselves Christians * can, with the best of intentions, be co-opted by evil systems. * (In America these will usually be Christians, but in MOSSAD these will be especially devout Jews and in Arab Mukhabarats [secret police] they are especially devout Muslims. Another thing learned long ago was that people in morally stressful occupations often adopt especially devout religious practices for compensation and frankly, relief from the stress.) Subsequent control mechanisms by the organization reinforce the fears, the penalties for talking to outsiders, the paranoia, black-white thinking, and ultimately the desire to conform. It is a mind control regime well understood by cults, and studied closely by the CIA during the MKULTRA days.

How to Escape the Insanity, Without Blowing Your Career (totally)

Tomorrow the sun will rise, the rain will fall somewhere, and our nation will desperately need a healthy intelligence community for many reasons. Tens of thousands of people will come to work at the 15 or so agencies, and enter a system that makes it almost impossible to do a good job. What to do? What to do to fix these problems, and to restore a healthy relationship between polite society and the warriors who exist to protect us (31)? Michael Warner wrote the most eloquent essay on differing definitions of intelligence I have seen (32) but Arthur Hulnick put it more succinctly: “Intelligence is a weapon of war.” We are certainly at war now, for good reasons and for bad ones. But the past is prologue; all that matters now, is now and the future.

The first step to solving any problem is recognizing that there is indeed a problem. Many, many people have tried to tell you that there is a serious problem in the IC, including many thoroughly vetted, extremely “cleared” insiders. Listen to them more, deny less; then act. If you’ve read this far you could infer that actually adopting some of those hundreds of recommendations from serious panels of vetted experts would be good. But most important of all is Steele’s recommendation to **‘put the security gremlins back in the closet.’** They are a central part of your problem. With the best of intentions, they are destroying our intelligence system.

Third, you should invite me over to wander around and ask questions of many people – without requiring that non-disclosure agreement which I will not sign. Yes, I am not joking. Most of my adult life I have taken significant risks in the service of our country, and I understand discretion. But you (as a system) have become so obsessed with getting “cleared” you can’t think clearly anymore. Like a drunk in the gutter, some of you think the answer is to drink more of that “clear” stuff. Not so. If you can’t get that basic truth, then you will continue to deny reality, exclude constructive critics, and deflect most of those hundreds of other attempts to fix the system, or at least to make it better. “Intelligence” should be about knowing what is going on, and understanding what to do in difficult circumstances, not JUST keeping secrets. Most of those secrets are junk anyway, and you know it. All of your worst traitors were thoroughly “clear” and some of your best allies won’t do that dumb stuff.

I will spend just a few more paragraphs here repeating just a few of the most important recommendations of very clear others for improvement of the system as it is. But the radical changes necessary are as cited above, and it’s important not to get lost in repeating old details.

First, system issues. It is obvious that technical collection gobbles up more money than any serious cost/benefit analysis would recommend compared to human intelligence and the broader areas of language and area studies. Odom says the NRO serves more as a conduit of cash for the aerospace industry than as anything innovative or even very useful these days, and Steele would go further (27). The vast majority of traffic intercepted by the NSA is never translated and goes unanalyzed, but the billion dollar a pop vacuum cleaners in the sky scoop it all up regardless. There are always more, and more expensive, technical collectors in the pipeline. He also observes that most of what you really want to know is not in English, not on the web, and is often not written down at all. As important as increasing budgets for HUMINT, the community would benefit by rethinking the concept of national security itself, to move it closer to the UN’s concept of human security. When 9/11 happened, the headlines were full of variations on “Why do they Hate us so much?” To ask that question is to reveal the kind of deep ignorance that fails to notice other little issues like the collapse of the Soviet Union. They hate us because our foreign policy is selfish and cruel. Who does not know that today? Apparently the intelligence community of the USA. If you are missing that, you are missing many other important things.

Thorough reviews of the issues faced by analysts and attempts to improve their training can be had from Jack Davis, the dean of intelligence training today (33) or Steven Marrin who has spent time inside, but is now working for the GAO and writing papers about how the Kent Center for intelligence analysis is trying to improve training on that side of the CIA (34, 35). Carol Dumaine, head of the Global Futures Partnership, is rumored to be among the best of the new generation, but almost all her stuff is classified so what can I know? I have no idea how to fix the deeply broken DO, and could not venture a guess without much better inside information. If you'd let me in to look around I could do you some good – we have a great deal in common after all. But I won't agree to, a) damage my mental abilities doing the spooky-luky dance, or b) cover up serious crimes in progress. I don't care about the past – it is now and the future that concerns me. And it is not about me – it's about your inability to deal with information that exposes your dark side and your blind spots. If you don't like me, invite someone else in who will tell you the things you need to know, instead of just echoing what you want to hear.

Second, personal issues. If you are an average member of the IC today (whatever that is) you are probably already addicted to the big salary that seems so small, coping with a mortgage and maybe a couple of kids (or alimony) in a high cost neighborhood, and have already invested years of your life preparing for this career. Bailing out is seldom an option, even if you discover you are working in a toxic, unhealthy mental environment due to the security gremlins and their demonic acolytes. But I don't want you to bail out anyway. We need good people in the IC. What I want you to do is to push that security envelope hard as you can without losing your job. I want you to leak a little more to our democratic media, so that the general public can get a clue what is going on, and what is truly wrong, without leaking the serious stuff that could actually endanger either the public or your special sources. That is a delicate business, of course. But if senior politicians and their staffs can do this every day, why not you? Why can't you decide what is truly significant, and when it is better kept secret or better made public? They can't fire everybody. So I say, tell your gremlin to get a life and remember, we were born in a democracy, not a police-state. For a less daring option, join Robert D. Steele's little gang of intelligence "rebels" at OSS.net. They have an annual conference in Washington D.C. each spring, and are trying in myriad ways to promote an open sources revolution which is one step toward the larger goal. Yes, he has stepped on many very clear toes. But he is pointed in the right direction, and has the cajones to challenge the nuts who most need challenging.

I would like to close by quoting several comments made by the current Deputy Director of Intelligence at CIA, Ms. Jami A. Miscek in her speech of February 11, 2004 to "All-Hands" present in the CIA auditorium that day (36). These are excerpted in order, with a few comments in brackets [] to make my points.

"Our Agency and our Directorate are taking a lot of criticism these days. In fact, Agency veterans to whom I have spoken say they haven't seen anything like it since Vietnam, or since the period in the mid-1970s when the Church committee was investigating the Agency."

"Our integrity goes hand-in-hand with our analytic objectivity. There is nothing more fundamental or important than our mandate to 'call it as we see it.' It is a core value – not just of the DI but of the CIA. This is the foundation upon which we do our work – it must be protected at all costs."

"A commitment to constant improvement is also one of our core values."

"I would say that the men and women who work in the Directorate are the most talented group of individuals anyone could ever hope to lead. And, I am lucky enough to know that first-hand."

"We assess the physical or mental health of a world leader without ever meeting or touching the patient." [Indeed, just as I am assessing you and your colleagues now, except that I've met many over the years, and touched them too. You certainly are a talented group of people. But your system is also ill.]

“When it comes to foreign intelligence there should be no such thing as DI and DO information, it is Agency information.” ... “If you work the issue, you need to know the information. Period.”

“The DCI has given the EXDIR 30 days to devise a permanent and lasting solution.”

“Today, I am announcing a senior DI officer as my Special Advisor for Analytic Tradecraft. He will have full access to all of my substantive meetings and direct access to me.” [OK, great, but this is like the Pope assigning a Cardinal to tell him his flaws. They share the most intimate set of blind spots vetted over decades of common assumptions. You must go further in the direction of your wise words.]

“A final area I want to focus on is the danger of inherited assumptions.” ... “There are critical assumptions that underlie the answers to such questions; we need to know what they are, to rigorously examine them, and, at all costs, we must avoid group-think.” [Indeed, Amen, Roger that!]

“Doing sophisticated, in-depth, value-added analysis requires a dialogue. ... Be courageous. And remember, we are not preempting your role as analysts when we question your judgments, we are executing our responsibilities as DI managers.” [As I am exercising a responsibility of American citizens ... by nagging you.]

“This is that serious. We cannot move forward without a thorough review of our tradecraft and where we find it falls short, we must find immediate solutions.” [So call me.]

“We will enhance our expertise and broaden our point of view by reaching out to others, employing contrarian analyses, and perhaps most importantly by expanding the diversity of our workforce.” [Really? Does this mean you are really going to bag the archaic security clearance system, or seriously modify it? If not, your “diversity” will remain intellectually sterile and functionally weak, brilliant though you are.]

When the Catholic Church went through its embarrassing time of trials it was essential to bring in real outsiders; not just consultants cleared by the same gang that caused the problems.

You all have my deepest sympathy. You do an amazingly important job under almost unbelievably difficult circumstances. And we need you to do better despite all obstacles. It is quite ridiculous for me to try to diagnose such difficult problems in such a complex system as yours from the outside of a vast information barrier specifically created to make seeing clearly difficult. Seeing clearly is my business, but your defenses are impressive. This is the best I can do so long as your system fears critical truth so much as it does today. If you want serious advice, you should let me in warts and all, to check things out. Then I could certainly tell you better what is broken and suggest practical ways to fix those problems. Best wishes always,

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Reactions to the first draft from spies and spooky-luky* guys

The very first comment I got, from a career, senior analyst/operator in a responsible position was to drop the "spooky-luky land" stuff. Well, sure, it won't do any good at all for me to mock my primary audience. But that is not the point. I have dropped it from most locations, not all, and offer a few additional words of explanation. First, the environment that spies and analysts work in is a very bizarre environment with 37 varieties of terrain and creatures in that. I need some term smaller than a paragraph to describe it. So sometimes I use "spooky-luky land" and "spies" generically. Second,

37. "Spooky-luky" is a term I use in memory of CWO Bill McCoy, a career CID investigator (Criminal Investigations Division, US Army) who devoted his retirement to helping spies unfairly punished by their systems for trying to do the right thing (often speaking truth to power when that was called for by the U.S. Constitution). He used this term when describing the excesses that led some 'true believers' into doing really stupid things like killing their colleagues. Believe me, things can get MUCH worse than just confused during covert operations.

Second, there was a very noticeable difference between reactions from Americans vs. non-Americans. The former with some exceptions were disturbed that I would write about such things, the latter cheered me on in various ways. Whether you agree with my conclusions or not, you can be certain that much of the world is wondering what has got into American intelligence today.

I will consider the critics first. The editor of a very prestigious journal for professional spies rejected my manuscript in approximately 2 minutes saying it was unsustainable, sources were bad, unnuanced, and so forth. Well there's no doubt it's less 'nuanced' than most third person, sanitized discussions of the business! What he had time to see was, a) the topic was taboo and unsettling, b) that in addition to fully certifiable, 100% insider citations, I also drew on some of the forbidden (or 'discredited') sources, and c) that I certainly violated the third person rule of academic prose and of abstracting human consequences out. These are all quite true, and I would probably have fallen over dead from shock if he'd accepted this manuscript at this time. But he also admitted, without any hesitation, that I was on to real problems. It was style and sources that annoyed him, not any doubt that problems of stress and psychiatric consequences were real. In fact, most of my American critics agree that the problems are real, just not discussable. Finally, his standard for sources would have been entirely CIA approved psychiatric reports which are of course not available (I tried) thereby rendering the topic undiscussable by the unwashed. Thus do secret problems fester unresolved.

Another gentleman with almost 40 years experience in the DI including very high level jobs indeed (whom I've known for many years) was extremely disappointed and wondered whether I had just dreamed this up one night. No, but that's OK. Years ago, he also could not believe the agency was ever involved in drug running. Three years of sponsoring panels on agency drug running did not convince him. Even when the CIA's inspector general published a report (F. Hitz, in 1998) admitting 54 namable CIA assets had been involved in narcotics trafficking from Central America, this friend still defended the point that this was not "policy" but just "bad apples." The argument that every institution has some problems is always true, and the Catholic Church used it for decades to deflect the pedophilia problem. What my distinguished friend cannot see, because he loves his institution so, is that this is not **JUST** a bad apple issue, and that it injures many more people than he can see.

A colleague of his with even more experience (not at the conference, by mail) gave a nice technical review, absolutely lacking in affect. This one has seen it all, and corrected some technical errors in my writing like it was just another analysis headed for the black hole that consumes most such papers in the agency. Meaning did not seem to matter much; method was everything. But I appreciate all critics. Several operators, and people with operational experience, took my paper without a word of comment, as they usually do. We shall see if pearls of wisdom or critique ensue.

The foreign nationals were considerably happier. One offered that the BND (German national intelligence) had a similar problem in the 1970's such that they established a special "drunkards" unit to deal with about 35 of the operators they could not fire. A recurring problem in this domain is the problem of "graymail" or threats from former operators that if they do not get their perpetual pension, and promptly, they will spill their beans and reveal secrets. So many have such embarrassing secrets to share that they almost always get their way, and are paid off. The BND paid theirs to clip newspapers until noon anyway, and be quite for the rest of their natural lives.

Another offered much better references on the parallel problems in MOSSAD, to avoid citing Ostrovsky who is widely hated there (for fairly good reasons). Some Nordic defense folks could not wait to see the sequel, because they are forever trying to survive clashes between the hegemon and in past, the Russian bear, at present, the coalition of forces lining up against the hegemon. Our defense guys are rather worried about that expectable trend, especially since it cannot be discussed openly today without risking one's career due to the extreme dominance of certain political appointees in the Pentagon, and their crystal clear propensity for firing folks who cross the taboo lines. One CIA vet with a pure heart whispered that it is true there too; today, one must whisper and obey.

That is one huge problem for the US of A, in my unvarnished opinion. Over and out - MA